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### 1878-1920

#### November 19, 1919 A Bitter Rejection

When members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee learned of former President Woodrow Wilson's death in 1924, they asked their chairman, Henry Cabot Lodge, to represent them at the funeral. Learning of this plan, the president's widow sent Lodge the following note: "Realizing that your presence would be embarrassing to you and unwelcome to me, I write to request that you do not attend."

Democrat Wilson and Republican Lodge had disliked one another for years. Among the first to earn doctoral degrees from the nation's newly established graduate schools, each man considered himself the country's preeminent scholar in politics and scorned the other.


The emergence of World War I intensified their rivalry. By 1918, Wilson had been president for nearly six years, while Lodge had represented Massachusetts in the Senate for a quarter century. Both considered themselves experts in international affairs. In setting policy for ending the war, Wilson, the idealist, sought a "peace without victory," while Lodge, the realist, demanded Germany's unconditional surrender.

When the 1918 midterm congressional elections transferred control of the Senate from the Democrats to the Republicans, Lodge became both majority leader and Foreign Relations Committee chairman. Whether Wilson liked it or not, he needed Lodge's active support to ensure Senate approval of the Treaty of Versailles and its provision for a League of Nations on which he had staked so much of his political prestige.

Wilson chose to ignore Lodge. He offended the Senate by refusing to include senators among the negotiators accompanying him to the Paris Peace Conference and by making conference results public before discussing them with committee members. In a flash of anger against what he considered Senate interference, Wilson denounced Lodge and his allies as "contemptible, narrow, selfish, poor little minds that never get anywhere but run around in a circle and think they are going somewhere."

After Lodge's committee added numerous "reservations" and amendments to the treaty, the frustrated president took his campaign to the nation. During a cross-country tour in October 1919, he suffered a physical collapse that further clouded his political judgment.

In November, Lodge sent to the Senate floor a treaty with 14 reservations, but no amendments. In the face of Wilson's continued unwillingness to negotiate, the Senate on November 19, 1919, for the first time in its history, rejected a peace treaty.



**Reference Items:**

Cooper, John Milton, Jr. *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

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With your group, respond to the following:

1. What are Wilson's reasons for joining the League of Nations?
2. What are Lodge's reasons for opposing the League of Nations?
3. Which man makes the stronger case? (Cite specifics to support your claim.)
4. Imagine yourselves as citizens in 1919: a returning soldier, a mother who lost her son, a senator (Republican or Democrat), a farmer, a recent immigrant living in a large city, etc. Which position regarding the treaty and the League of Nations do you favor? Why?

Be prepared to share your opinions with other groups in class.